

Individual  
Differences**What is Personality?**Last updated:  
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Personality is the supreme realization of the innate idiosyncrasy of a living being. It is an act of high courage flung in the face of life, the absolute affirmation of all that constitutes the individual, the most successful adaptation to the universal condition of existence coupled with the greatest possible freedom for self-determination."

- Carl Gustav Jung, 1934

**As we move from intelligence to personality...**

As this course moves from intelligence (1st 5 weeks) into personality (next 10 weeks), it is worth pointing out that the relationship between intelligence and personality may be stronger than many assume.

Intelligence influences different aspects of personality in many different ways. In fact, intelligence is sometimes considered to be part of personality. This issue will probably always be debated. The main point to bear in mind is that both intelligence and personality are prominent individual differences.

Personality is not easily defined. Basically, 'personality' refers to our attempts to capture or summarize an individual's 'essence'. Personality is person-ality, the science of describing and understanding persons. Clearly, personality is a core area of study for psychology, if not the core. Together with intelligence, the topic of personality constitutes the most significant area of individual difference study.

No two people are exactly the same - not even identical twins. Some people are anxious, some are risk-taking; some are phlegmatic, some highly-strung; some are confident, some shy; and some are quiet and some are loquacious. This issue of differences is fundamental to the study of personality. Note also that in studying these differences we will also examine where the differences come from: as with intelligence we will find that there is a mixture of nature and nurture involved.

Perspectives on personality that we'll be examining...

- Trait Perspective
- Biological Perspective
- Psychoanalytic Perspective
- Learning Perspective
- Phenomenological Perspective
- Cognitive Perspective

**Lay usage of the term "personality"**

We use the term personality frequently but what does it actually mean?

"She has a wonderful personality."  
 "He has no personality."  
 "He has personality plus."  
 "We seem to have a personality conflict."  
 "It's just her personality."  
 "She has her mother's personality."  
 "He's a real personality."

### **Personality comes from the Greek word "persona", meaning "mask"**

The word 'personality' derives from the Latin word 'persona' which means 'mask'. The study of personality can be understood as the study of 'masks' that people wear. These are the personas that people project and display, but also includes the inner parts of psychological experience which we collectively call our 'self'.

### **"I" is for personality**

According to Adams (1954, cited in Schultz & Schultz, 1994) personality is "I".

Adams suggested that we get a good idea of what personality is by listening to what we say when we use "I". When you say I, you are, in effect, summing up everything about yourself - your likes and dislikes, fears and virtues, strengths and weaknesses.

The word I is what defined you as an individual, as a person separate from all others." (Schultz & Schultz, 1994, p.8)

### **"I am" exercise**

Write 10 honest endings to "I am..."

Share them with someone

Does this sum up your personality? Why or why not?

### **Various definitions of personality**

- "Deceptive masquerade or mimicry."
- "The entire organization of a human being at any stage of development."
- "Levels or layers of dispositions, usually with a unifying or integrative principle at the top."
- "The integration of those systems or habits that represent an individual's characteristic adjustments to the environment."
- "The way in which the person does such things as remembering, thinking or loving."
- "Those characteristics that account for consistent patterns of behaviour"
- "Personality is not an existing substantive entity to be searched for but a complex construct to be developed and defined by the observer."  
 (Smith & Vetter, 1982, p.5)
- A contemporary definition for personality is offered by Carver and Scheier (2000, p.5): "Personality is a dynamic organisation, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create a person's characteristic patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and feelings." Carver & Scheier (2000, p.5)
  - Dynamic Organisation: suggests ongoing readjustments, adaptation to experience, continual upgrading and maintaining Personality doesn't just lie there. It has process and it's organised.
  - Inside the Person: suggests internal storage of patterns, supporting the notion that personality influences behaviours, etc.

- Psychophysical systems: suggests that the physical is also involved in 'who we are'
- Characteristic Patterns: implies that consistency/continuity which are uniquely identifying of an individual
- Behaviour, Thoughts, and Feelings: indicates that personality includes a wide range of psychological experience/manifestation: that personality is displayed in MANY ways.
- Carver & Scheier (2000, p.5) suggest that the word personality "conveys a sense of consistency, internal causality, and personal distinctiveness". This issue of "personal distinctiveness is very important. There are certain universal characteristics of the human race and particular features of individuals. We all for example experience stress and the elevated cortisol that goes with it, and we all suffer the immune suppressive effects thereof. BUT each of us is unique too.

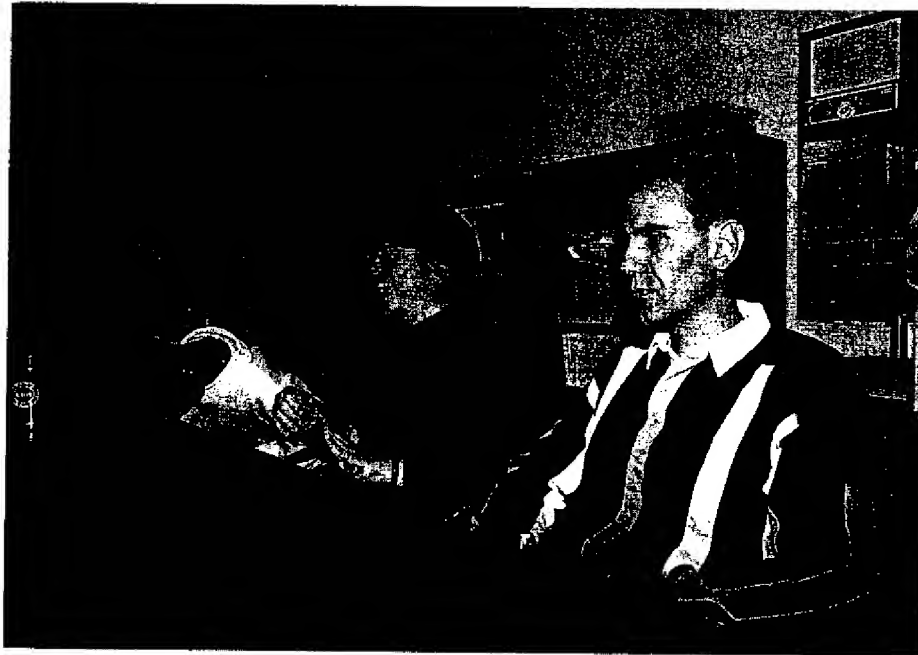
## References

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Individual differences in behavior and reactions are an important part of personality.

dicting you'll get along well. When you tell a chronically late friend that the movie starts at 8 when it really starts at 8:30, you're predicting that this will get her to arrive more or less on time. An important source of information behind these predictions is your judgment about what the other person's personality is like.

The term *personality* is also used for another reason. It often conveys the sense that a few characteristics can summarize what a person is like because they are prominent in that person's behavior. Saying that Karen has an outgoing personality implies that she seems outgoing much of the time. Saying that Tanya has a hostile personality implies that hostility influences many of her actions. The qualities that first come to mind when you try to describe someone are the ones that you think seem central to that person. The more central the quality is, the more useful it is for predicting the person's behavior. Thinking about the highly prominent characteristics of a person brings to mind the concept of personality.

These are some reasons why people use the term *personality*. This patchwork of reasons for using it moves us closer to having a definition for it. That is, the word *personality* conveys a sense of consistency, internal causality, and personal distinctiveness. As it happens, these qualities are built into almost all definitions of personality.

### A Working Definition

Here's one definition. We're not saying that this is the "right" one, but we think it comes close. We've adapted it slightly from one given decades ago by Gordon Allport (1961): *Personality is a dynamic organization, inside the person, of psychophysical systems that create the person's characteristic patterns of behavior, thoughts, and feelings.*

This definition makes several points:

- Personality isn't just an accumulation of bits and pieces; it has *organization*.
- Personality doesn't just lie there; it's active, with *processes* of some sort.
- Personality is a *psychological* concept, but it's tied to the *physical* body.